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Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency  
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## Coyotes in Tennessee

The coyote may be found in all of the United States (except Hawaii), Canada and Mexico. Although native to the desert southwest, circumstances have allowed the coyote to extend his home range eastward into Tennessee. Reasons for range expansion include the decline of wolves, habitat availability, and natural range expansion. The coyote, red fox and gray fox are the only wild canids that inhabit Tennessee.

Coyotes are very vocal animals, its latin name "canis latrans" means barking dog. Intelligent and very adaptable, they can live almost anywhere including fields, farmlands, forests and urban areas.

### Physical Characteristics



The average weight of a coyote in Tennessee is 20-40 pounds, about the size of a small to medium sized German Shepard. The coyote has erect, pointed ears, slender muzzle with a black nose and a bushy tail which is carried down as it runs.

The coyotes' fur is long, coarse and heavy, varying in color. Most are grizzled gray or brown to reddish gray with buff under-parts. A grey-black band of longer hair (typically five inches long) runs down the mid-back and forms a shoulder saddle or mane. The eyes are typically yellow or amber with round black pupils. Their eyesight is

six times greater than mans. Sense of smell is extremely well developed, more than 23 times better than mans. Coyotes rely upon this sense for hunting and detecting scent left by other coyotes. The coyote may run up to 30 mph for short distances. They are good swimmers; however, coyotes are poor climbers.

Coyote tracks are oval in shape and the toenail marks tend to hook inwards. Dog tracks are more round and have deeper nail marks pointed outward. As typical with all members of the dog family, the coyote's front foot is larger than the hind foot. The front foot track of the coyote averages 2 ½ inches in length. Coyote droppings (scats) are quite variable but are typically large, strongly tapered and contain much hair, bones, feathers or seeds.

### Life History

A typical group of coyotes consist of a mating pair and their off springs. The family unit is largest in the summer when pups, parents, and non-breeding adults are together at dens.

Coyotes breed during January through March. Daytime activity increases during the coyotes breeding season. After breeding season, coyotes begin a frenzy of feeding activity and begin searching for suitable denning sites. Coyotes may dig their own den or enlarge another animals den. Natural holes, blown down trees or rocky ledges may also be utilized as den locations.



The typical litter size is 5-6 pups born 60-63 days after breeding. The entire family unit including the mother, father and other family members help raise young by providing food. The young are weaned after 5-7 weeks. Young coyotes begin dispersal in October, at which point a young coyote may travel up to 100 miles

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from its birthplace.

Coyotes are chiefly nocturnal, but may be active by day. Coyotes communicate through a series of yips, barks and howls. A common call of the coyote is two short barks and long wavering yodel known as the howl. They use stumps, posts, bushes or rocks as "scent posts" on which they urinate and defecate, this marks the animals territory and communicates with other animals.

Adult males have large territories (15-25 square miles) in which they roam; adult females occupy areas of six to ten square miles. The availability of food affects the territory size of the coyote. The adaptable coyote may eat almost anything. They prefer fresh kills but will eat carrion. The most important foods to the coyote are rodents, rabbits, insects, watermelons, apples, persimmons, muskrats, squirrels, skunks and domestic fowl.

### Major Differences Between Coyotes & Dogs

- The coyote is similar in size to a small to medium German Shepherd
- Coyotes carry their tails quite differently than a domestic dog. A coyote's tail is typically held down, although not between the animal's legs. Dogs usually carry their tails in the air.
- An adult coyote track is approximately 2 1/2 inches in length. The track is shaped like an oval, and the toenails are close together and hook inward. A dog's track is round in shape and the toenails tend to point outward. The walking stride ranges between 12 to 15 inches apart. When running, the stride made be anywhere from 3 to 10 feet apart.

### Hunting Season

Coyotes may be hunted year-round in Tennessee . There is no bag limit.

### Disease

Coyotes are susceptible to a variety of diseases including rabies, mange, distemper, parvo enteritis, hepatitis and internal parasites. External parasites including lice, mites, fleas and ticks also afflict coyotes. In other states coyotes have become human health concerns because they are reservoir hosts of rabies. Coyotes are not reservoir hosts of rabies in Tennessee .

### Urban Coyotes

Coyotes are highly adaptable and can survive in urban areas as long as food and shelter requirements are met. In urban areas coyotes will feed on almost anything including garbage, pet food, small cats and dogs, and other wild animals such as rodents, skunks, raccoons and birds.

Coyotes typically hunt alone, however they may hunt in groups when food is abundant.



Coyote pups are born in dens. In urban environments, dens can be storm drains, culverts, under storage sheds, under porches, holes in vacant lots, parks, golf courses, or any dry area.

Coyotes are sighted more often these days due to several factors. The human population has increased greatly over the past few years combined with a decrease in open farmlands (natural coyote habitat). Many well meaning residents have promoted an unnatural boldness in coyotes by intentionally or unintentionally feeding them. This has encouraged coyotes to become accustomed to the sights, sounds and scents of humans.

In areas where they are hunted and trapped, coyotes are extremely wary of humans. However, in urban areas where they are less likely to be harmed and more likely to associate people with an easy and dependable source of food, they

lose the fear of humans. Coyotes will come up on porches and decks if food is regularly present. Animals that have lost their natural fear of humans (associating humans with food) become dangerous to humans and that animals lifespan is shortened.

Coyote attacks are extremely rare. In recorded history only 30 coyote attacks on humans have been recorded. Three million children are bitten by dogs each year, a child is millions of times more likely to get attacked by the family pet than a coyote.

The vast majority of coyote attacks in the United States are the result of a coyote attacking a small dog or cat and the pet's owner trying to stop the attack by getting between the animals. When the pet's owner gets between the animals, the coyote will bite the pet's owner. Many attacks occur when coyotes become comfortable around humans, often a result of people feeding them.

If a wild coyote bites you, seek medical attention immediately. Notify the state health department as soon as possible.

## Dealing With Urban Coyotes

- **Do not feed coyotes!!** When coyotes begin associating humans with food they lose their natural fears and may become dangerous.
- Eliminate water sources. These areas attract rodents, birds, and snakes which the coyote will prey upon.
- Position bird feeders so coyotes can not get to the feed. Coyotes may also be attracted to birds and small mammals that have been lured in by the feeder.
- Do not discard edible garbage. Coyotes are opportunistic and will eat any table scraps.
- Secure garbage containers. Use trash barrels with lids that clamp down tight even when tipped over.
- Do not place trash cans out the night before scheduled pick up. Placing cans out the morning before pick up will give coyote less time to scavenge, they will not have cover of darkness.
- Do not leave barbecue grill outside and uncovered, the smell of the grill and the contents of the grills drip pan attracts coyotes.
- Feed pets indoors whenever possible. Remove any leftovers if feeding outdoors. Store pet food in area not accessible to other animals.
- Clear brush and weeds from around property. This deprives the coyotes prey (small mammals and birds) of protective cover and deters coyote from hunting around your property.
- A Fenced yard may deter coyotes. The fence must be at least 6 feet high. Preferably the bottom of the fence should extend 6 inches below ground level.
- Do not leave small children outside alone if coyotes have been frequenting the area.
- Do not allow pets to run free. Provide secure housing especially at night. Small pets (cats, rabbits, small dogs) are favorite prey of coyotes.
- Discourage coyotes from frequenting your area. Harass them by throwing rocks, shouting, and making loud noises when one is seen.

